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THE SEAL:

OR,



The Inward Spiritual Grace of Confirmation.

BY MISS CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

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FREDERICTON:
W. T. H. FENETY, QUEEN STREET.



THE SEAL;

OR,

THE INWARD SPIRITUAL GRACE OF CONFIRMATION.

ST. PAUL says to the Ephesians, 'And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of Redemption.' (*Chap. iv. 30.*)

This makes us think what St. Paul can mean, and leads us to look into other parts of Holy Scripture for explanation.

We will turn back to a very early part of the Bible. When the holy prophet Ezekiel was living on the banks of the river Chebar, in Babylonia, whither he had been taken with his king, Jehoiachin, and others of the princes and Levites, God shewed him many visions of his dear home at Jerusalem, and of those his brethren who yet remained there; that he might warn them to provoke God no further, but to


turn away His wrath from their city, or at any rate, each man from himself.

In one of these visions — it is to be found in Ezekiel's ninth chapter — just after God had shown him how the glorious Temple itself, God's own house of prayer, was full of persons worshipping idols, the prophet beheld the destroyers, each with his weapon in his hand, gathered within the Temple, ready for the slaughter, and only waiting for the word. Then he saw a figure, clothed in linen, with an ink-horn by his side. Then a voice from the bright glory that betokened the Presence of God, spake and said,

‘Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark* on the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.’

The same voice added, to those who held the slaughter weapons —

‘Go ye after him through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity. Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.’

*[In Hebrew it is “set a tau,” and tau is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The old form of tau was  a cross.]

We might perhaps think that this awful message belonged only to the days when Nebuchadnezzar's men were doing God's work of vengeance upon the idolatrous Jerusalem, and when the unseen mark of God guarded His true servants in the midst of destruction; but God's words are much too great and far-reaching to have their fulfilment entirely at once, and they stretch on much farther than what concerned that first destruction of Jerusalem.

This very vision of Ezekiel was, as it were, carried on, and rendered more terrible and more significant, when nearly seven hundred years later, St. John the Evangelist, in his captivity, likewise saw the doom of the faithless revealed.

Instead of the Temple of Jerusalem, St. John beheld the courts of Heaven; instead of the Mercy-seat, the Throne of God; instead of the carved Cherubim, the Four Living Creatures; instead of the daily sacrifice, the Lamb as it had been slain. But it was the hour of wrath for those who had despised the blessed Sacrifice of the Lamb; and thus, instead of the six with their slaughter weapons, St. John beheld the horsemen going forth to slay; 'a pale horse, and his name that sat thereon was Death, and Hell followed with him.' Moreover, he saw four angels standing, holding the four winds of heaven, and instead of him with the ink-horn,

he saw an 'angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.'

And while the earthquake, the fire, the destruction, had their way on the earth, the sealed wore their white robes, waved their palms, and cried,

'Salvation to our God that sitteth on the Throne, and to the Lamb.'

We know that St. John's visions are of the state of things in which we live — on to the end of time. Therefore, what can import to us more than to be sure that we receive, and that we do not lose, that seal on the forehead which is to mark us for safety in the hour of vengeance?

Now is that seal affixed on our brow unconsciously, as it seems to have been in Ezekiel's vision? Is it God's mark of holiness, unknown to man? In some degree it may be; and yet St. Paul speaks of it as being the right common to all Christians, for he says to the Corinthians,

'Now He which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who

both also *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' (2 Cor. i. 21, 22.)

And again, to the Ephesians: 'After that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that Holy Spirit of Promise.' (Eph. i. 13.) And later in the Epistle he says, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye were *sealed* unto the day of redemption.'

Thus it is plain that St. Paul regarded the sealing as the special work of the Holy Ghost—nay, as if the Holy Ghost were Himself the Seal. Where He is present, the soul and body bear their seal and are safe, so that to them the day of vengeance is the day of redemption. Yet this Seal, this abiding Presence of the Holy Spirit, cannot be only the mark of a perfect Christian, just ready to die. It must be given to him while yet he is in a state of trial, and be liable to be lost; or St. Paul would not speak as if everyone in his Church had it, or bid them beware of grieving the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, he says that the Ephesians were sealed *after* they had believed; (*chap. i. 13.*) and his words to the Corinthians couple this sealing with the Holy Spirit with the being established, and anointed to God.

Surely, then, the Sealing must be the having the special grace of the Holy Ghost conferred. See, then, how the Apostles conveyed this

grace. When Philip the deacon had baptized the converts at Samaria, St. Peter and St. John were sent down, 'who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost; (for as yet He was fallen on none of them; only they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus;) then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.' (*Acts* viii. 15-17.)

To Cornelius the Holy Spirit came visibly before Baptism; but that was an exceptional work of God, wrought to remove all doubt as to the admission of the Gentiles; but he was baptized afterwards, so that it is plain that Baptism and Sealing by the Holy Ghost are two different things.

Indeed, though the Samaritans were baptized by Philip, the two Apostles laid their hands on them before they received the Holy Ghost; and later we find that after the Ephesians had been baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus, 'when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them.' (*Acts* xix. 6.) And it is in writing to these very men that he reminds them that 'after they had believed, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.'

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we find 'Baptisms and the laying on of hands' spoken of as the very first outset of the Christian

course; and from all these evidences we perceive that not only were Christians received to Baptism, but that as soon as possible afterwards, the Apostles whom our Lord had Himself commissioned, laid their hands on them, and thus conveyed to them the Presence of the Holy Ghost; and that this was called by St. Paul the Sealing of the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. What that Seal does for Christians we further know from the awful yet hopeful sight which St. John beheld, of the dire judgments of God fast bound, until the sealing of all the faithful shall have secured them. And though in St. John's vision the sealing was the work of angels, yet we know that angels are messengers of God; so that what is done by the Ministry of Christ, would be spoken of as done by the angels. Indeed, in the earlier chapters of the Book of Revelation, we find the course of bishops, the episcopal ministry of each place, spoken of as the angel of such and such a Church; and our Lord says the stars in His Right Hand are the angels of the Churches. These angels who sealed the servants of God, would plainly mean the messenger spirits, including the whole line of bishops of each Church from the very first, all gathered into one vision before the Saint.

The Churches in the very places where St.

Paul and St. John preached still use the name 'Sealing,' while we use the word 'Confirmation' for being thus marked by the Apostolic hand. We all know that the grace that our blessed Lord gave to His Apostles to be imparted to the whole Church, is continued to our Bishops, and that the same grace that was bestowed by the laying on of the Apostles' hand is still bestowed by the laying on of our Bishops' hands; so that when we kneel before our Bishop, it is the same thing as when the Samaritan and Ephesian converts knelt before St. Peter, St. John, and St. Paul. The power of speaking different languages and of working miracles was sometimes conferred at such times, in order that the yet untaught people might know of the coming of the Holy Ghost by their outward senses.

But we have to trust to faith instead of to sight; and our Lord Himself, and His Apostles after Him, have told us that these wonderful gifts were of no consequence at all to the soul of the possessor. They were only given to convince the Jews and heathens; the real benefit, the being sealed by the Presence of the Holy Spirit, comes to us without these outward signs, as it came to the Christians of old with them.

So it is that the Bishop makes the solemn prayer, 'Strengthen them, O Lord, with the

Holy Ghost the Comforter, and daily increase in them Thy manifold gifts of grace: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the Spirit of Thy holy fear.'

Such is the Sevenfold Seal of the blessed Spirit of God; and it is the more precious because this is the same Holy Spirit wherewith JESUS our Lord became the Anointed, the Christ. (*Acts* x. 38.) For doth not Isaiah say, 'There shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, and the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD, and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.' (*Isaiah* xi. 1, 2.) In this manner, it may be, that 'Him hath God the Father sealed.' (*St. John* vi. 27.) How should even our chief pastors dare to hand on to us that awful Seal, that wonderful Anointing, but that we are His members, and His blessings flow down to us, as did the oil on Aaron's head to the utmost parts of his clothing? (*Psalms* cxxxiii.)

Who, then, would presume to turn away from the Seal of the Holy Spirit, by which we are to

be marked for the great day? Who would venture to go without that laying on of hands, by which, once for all, the blessed Spirit may be conveyed to us as surely as when He sat on the Apostles in fiery tongues?

At our Baptism we were indeed born into Christ's Church. Our new life began then, our spirits became alive to the influences of God; but the work is imperfect till the Seal is given. It was to the hands of the Apostles that our Lord committed the power of conveying the presence of God the Holy Ghost; and as their successors, the Bishops, cannot be present at every Baptism, Confirmation—that is, sealing—or laying on of hands, is made to wait till a suitable time afterwards; but many persons have been confirmed immediately after their Baptism, even in their infancy. For Confirmation is, like Baptism, a thing that is done to us by God once for all, not one that we do for ourselves. A babe has no unbelief, therefore it can be baptized; and for the same reason it can be sealed, or confirmed. If an older person were wicked enough to come to holy Baptism without repentance or faith, he would not be fulfilling the condition; and so, too, we must bring faith when we come to be confirmed, really knowing what we are about.

Thus it is a very holy and solemn occasion to

us, and our Church has thought that it is a fit time for us to pronounce our own ratification of our Baptismal Vow. Some people make mistakes about it, and fancy the making the vow for ourselves is the chief point in Confirmation. But this is not the fact. Nothing we do can be so important as what we receive from God, and we have in reality accepted the vow every time we have answered our catechist's question, 'Dost thou not think thou art bound to do and believe as they (our sponsors) promised for thee?' 'Yes, verily; and by God's help so I will.'

Of course the renewing the vow is a deep and anxious matter; and if we do not take it with our whole heart, we can be in no frame of mind to meet the blessing of being sealed by God the Holy Ghost. But we must not fall into the mistake of thinking that the making the vow for ourselves is the great matter. Confirmation is not our confirming our own vow, but God's confirming us in the strength of the Holy Spirit. We are just as much bound by our vow before Confirmation as after it. The difference is that Confirmation gives us more power to keep it, by strengthening us with the sevenfold Seal of God the Holy Ghost.

Therefore, let no young person fancy that he or she goes to Confirmation to release God-

parents from their vows. The sponsors were merely the child's voice; and if the child would receive the benefits, it must keep the promises that they depend on. Neither let any elder person, who remembers making the vow childishly and thoughtlessly, think that Confirmation can again be resorted to. The vow can indeed be renewed — we can do so secretly at any time, best of all at the Holy Communion — but as to the sealing, the conferring of that Anointing of the Holy Spirit in virtue of which we are called Christians, from the Name of Christ, the Anointed, that is given once, and may not be sought again.

Young people, then, 'grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.' Come in faith and earnestness to make your promise and receive your Seal, and guard it faithfully to the end.

Elders, who are conscious of thoughtlessness and evil, pray and seek in the Holy Communion that the Seal once given, and now tarnished and defaced, may shine forth once more in the holiness of life that bears witness to the Presence of the Holy Ghost, that so the angels of destruction may see God's mark on your brow, and the day of terror may be to you the day of full adoption.

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